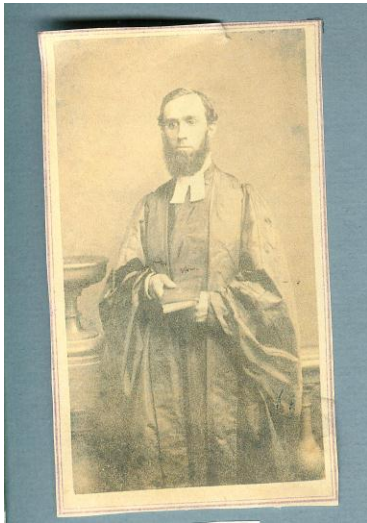




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## St. Paul's Church and the Civil War



William S. Coffey, the St. Paul's rector in the Civil War era.

Protestant ministers were among the leaders of the Northern antislavery crusade in the decades before the Civil War, but the Episcopal clergy rarely got involved in the abolitionist movement. Emphasizing continuity in religious and moral affairs, Episcopalians, including the parish of St. Paul's Church, avoided progressive reform campaigns. Additionally, with parishes in both the North and South, the Episcopal Church was leery of disrupting the denomination with an open discussion about slavery, especially in light of the separations that such a dialogue created in other Protestant churches.

The St. Paul's community's response to the Civil War was also influenced by a conservative political stance on the controversial sectional issues. Good relations and open trade with all regions of the republic were crucial for metropolitan New York, the nation's great mercantile

emporium. With strong commercial and social ties to the South, New York's most valuable export in 1860 was cotton; it was called "the most Southern city in the North." The city and the surrounding communities, including the St. Paul's vicinity, opposed Republican antislavery principles because they feared such radical appeals threatened the stability of the Union.

Like its neighbors, the town of

Eastchester, which encompassed the parish of St. Paul's, voted against the Republican candidate, Abraham Lincoln, in the Presidential elections of 1860 and 1864, and all local newspapers were Democratic.

### **The New-York Times.**

NEW-YORK, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 1864.

#### WESTCHESTER COUNTY.

West Farms—McClellan, 56 majority; Seymour, 36; Radford, Dem., for Congress, 53 majority. Strong, Union, for Assembly, has 12 majority. Yonkers gives McClellan, 233 majority; Seymour, 244 majority; Radford, Dem., for Congress, 194 majority.  
Vote of New Rochelle complete. McClellan, 391; Lincoln, 239.  
East Chester. First District. Lincoln, 269; McClellan 368. Fenton, 269; Seymour, 307. Radford, Democrat, for Congress has 97 majority. Second District. McClellan 92 majority.

Results from the Nov. 1864 election show George B. McClellan, the Democratic candidate, defeating President Lincoln in Westchester County.

While this conservative backdrop fashioned the community's reaction to the great national conflict, St. Paul's was not a Copperhead neighborhood. There's no record of demonstrations in favor of the Confederacy or activities to disrupt the Union war effort. Following secession, which was considered lawless treason, most people supported the effort to preserve the stability and permanence of the Union, while opposing emancipation and the war measures of the Lincoln government. Many parishioners volunteered for the Union army. Women met in the church to assemble care packages for soldiers at the front.

No rousing abolitionist sermons or strong war cries were expressed from the St. Paul's pulpit, yet the church rector William T. Coffey sustained the military effort to preserve the nation on a more personal level. Community tradition recalls Rev. Coffey's support for the Union, and private correspondence articulated his views, assuring one soldier at the front "I feel a deep interest in the cause in which you are engaged. I know of scarcely another so holy. Common gratitude, self interest and philanthropy demand the efforts at whatever the sacrifice to sustain our government."